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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses concerns about effects of current changes in higher education on development of leadership personnel (professors and researchers) in special education. It suggests that current changes are a consequence of external expectations and a failure of faculty to protect the cultural values of academia. The prominent role of departments of special education in the interdisciplinary study of disability as well as income generation is noted, as is the influence of federal investment in leadership preparation since 1958, and the passage of Public Law 85-926, the "Training of Professional Personnel for the Education of Mentally Retarded Children" Act. The paper goes on to list major trends in higher education since this law and concludes that special education programs within universities are highly vulnerable unless they persist as research and development academic units with an interdisciplinary focus on disability. Among 10 recommendations are: (1) keeping an R&D focus, (2) resisting restructuring that diminishes the special education identity, (3) remaining interdisciplinary, and (4)recognizing the importance of collegiality within the department. (DB)

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1998 OSEP Leadership Training Conference Presentation

"Preparing Leadership Personnel for an Increasingly Diverse World: From a Higher Education Perspective"

Ed Meyen
University of Kansas
July 15, 1998

ED 421 809

It is a privilege for me to be in your presence today. You represent the leadership of our field. As the leaders of today, you share the burden of ensuring that the leadership of tomorrow possesses the talent and initiative to survive in higher education and to be instrumental in ensuring that in the future conditions will prevail which allow faculty and researchers of tomorrow to be responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

You are also largely responsible for how higher education will respond to the research and personnel preparation needs of special education in the future.

Above all you are responsible for the culture that gives life and purpose to graduate study in our field.

This is an awesome responsibility. Unfortunately it is also a responsibility which you can anticipate little assistance in meeting from your institution. I realize that these words sound a little rhetorical. They are not intended to. On the surface these words might suggest that we need to continue doing what we are doing now to preserve the future. These words are not intended to do that either.

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My goal this morning is to convince you that it is not the generation of new knowledge or determining how to best educate students with disabilities that is our greatest challenge for the future; rather our challenge is to survive in a changing higher education environment while positioning for the future the organizational unit that serves as the focus for research and personnel preparation in special education – your departments.

My topic is "Preparing Leadership Personnel for an Increasingly Diverse World: From a higher education perspective." The diverse world I am

referring to is the world of higher education as operationalized in the universities we represent. The leadership personnel I am referring to are our replacements and colleagues of the future. They are the next generation of professors and researchers.

I am confident you will all agree that higher education is changing and you are having to adjust. Adjusting to change in academe is always difficult, but personally adjusting to constant change is even more difficult. We are not like private industry that is free to change its mission, products, organization, leadership and even its locations if it is seen to be in its best interest. The institutions we represent are answerable to external boards, their graduates, the public and the professions they serve.

While we accept and promote change - few of us relish the uncertainty that accompanies constant change.

We each probably have our own theory on why higher education is undergoing change and our views on whether what is occurring is good or bad.

In a nutshell my theory is that the nature of the change occurring in higher education is a consequence of external expectations and a failure of faculty to protect the culture that made American universities the best system of higher education in the world.

We have failed to protect our culture because we have not been sensitive to its influence on our institutions during our careers - nor have we been willing to assume those roles that ensure the culture we value and benefit from will continue. We are now faced with the possibility that like the organization of our institution, the culture will also change. As the culture changes the values change.

Source of Influence

Before we explore the future or even speculate on what we should be doing in the present I think it is important to examine the influence of special education on higher education from an historical perspective. There is little question but that departments of special education have emerged in higher education as more visible--if not more significant-- departments than their counterparts.

It is not uncommon to find a department of special education ranked among the most productive in terms of scholarship and research on major university campuses. In schools of education it is not uncommon for them to generate more external dollars than all other units in their school.

Special education departments represent the key element in the interdisciplinary study of disability. It is this interdisciplinary effort that pushes the knowledge base on disability forward.

Why is this? Why do we find departments of special education at major research universities like yours being cited as outstanding departments? I don't think that it has much to do with the innate challenge of studying disability or the altruism of our universities. Nor do I believe that it just happened because this is "America" and we should have strong programs associated with the study of disability.

I believe that the long term partnership between higher education, policy makers and our bureaucratic system created the conditions that allowed the study of disability to flourish . It may have occurred unknowingly but it is what I believe.

Some of you might reject this notion of bureaucratic influence and argue instead that special education owes its stature in higher education to its leaders in the field. There is some truth to that. But, let's look at how this leadership initiative we are engaged in today began.

Do you remember Public Law 85-926 passed in 1958? Almost 40 years ago this month. The title of the Act was "Training of Professional Personnel for the Education of Mentally Retarded Children." This was the beginning of federally funded doctoral fellowships. Two years later the program was expanded to include deaf education and later broadened to cover most areas of disabilities and the rest is history.

For those of you who are of a more recent vintage I would remind you that sixteen universities were awarded funds for fellowships in the first year of PL 85-926. Included among those institutions were Columbia University, the universities of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Syracuse, Georgia, Boston University and Yeshiva University.

Does the list sound familiar?

The directors of the first projects on those campuses were people such as Burton Blatt, Frances Connor, Bill Carriker, Sam Kirk, William Morse, G. Orville Johnson, Jack Birch, Bill Wolf, William Cruickshank and Herb Goldstein.

Sound familiar?

The University of Kansas was not on the list....but it was still a good list. Shortly there after George Peabody College for Teachers, the University of Washington, and the University of Kansas plus a few others joined the group.

Did the leaders build these programs or did the beginning of the federal investment in leadership preparation create the opportunities that made these individuals leaders? It is not important to answer that question, but I believe that it is important to acknowledge the federal role in building academic programs to produce leaders in special education.

It is equally important to acknowledge the influence of the federal initiatives to support research that followed shortly thereafter and how this combined effort influenced what we collectively represent today.

Fortunately, for those of us who have a bent toward teacher education and research, the federal initiatives in leadership personnel and research came together in departments of special education.

Yes, there were the institutes at Illinois, Peabody and Columbia plus the Bureau of Child Research at Kansas. But, the dominant model was the academic department and consequently departments of special education became just what comprehensive research universities wanted.

They became R&D departments. They recruited scholars who could survive in major universities. They attracted graduate students who went on to leadership roles in higher education and other organizations including the public schools. Their graduates became contributors to the literature and builders of the knowledge base.

This maturation of special education as an academic unit occurred because the conditions were right and remained right over several decades. Most importantly, those who were the campus stewards of the federal resources were also committed to building the culture that would sustain the R&D focus within the constraints of an academic department while moving into the interdisciplinary world of a university.

That comes only with maturity…a level of maturity achieved by few academic departments.

I submit to you that our future is dependent on making the best of this maturity. We have a partnership that can push the edge in bringing quality to the lives of Americans with disabilities. Let's not succumb to a second childhood and fall into the trap of making changes for self-serving purposes.

There are lessons to be learned from reflecting on the past 40-years. It may be the only such case study of its kind in higher education.

Special education is the only department within education and possibly in higher education to benefit over time from a policy of federal support. I don't mean to overlook the influence of advocacy or the significant history of legislation that brought equity to the education of children and youth with disabilities nor the legislation that has brought optimism to adults with disabilities.

Those initiatives too had their influence on special education in higher education. But, they were also influenced by the leadership produced by special education departments.

It was, in my judgment, the access to external funds in a competitive environment that created the conditions that allowed us to make a difference.

Making the funding of programs a competitive process rather than an entitlement was an important decision by the federal government.

Having reminded you of this bit of special education history I want you to reflect with me for a moment about what has been happening in higher education during these past 40 years since PL 85-926 was passed.

- In the 1960's higher education experienced unprecedented growth.

- Curricula were expanded and new degree programs flourished.
- Social unrest competed with academics for the attention of students.
- Federal funding for constructing higher education facilities became available, but was short-lived.
- In the early 70's colleges became universities and doctoral granting institutions were expanded.
- Affirmative action emerged as a higher education initiative in the recruitment of students and faculty.
- In the late seventies and early eighties universities began to create off campus graduate centers. – We began taking higher education to the consumer-practicing professionals.
- Student grants and loans grew along with support for research. The American University became the research arm of our economy.
- About this time the recurring reform initiatives that had focused intermittently for half a century on K-12 education began to focus on higher education. A new experience for universities.
- Policy makers and the public in general began to raise concerns about the quality and direction of higher education.
- Governing boards and administrators found themselves having to respond to their several publics including students and faculty about the mission and direction of their institutions. Policy makers became so bold as to suggest that institutions should prepare young people for employment.
    - By the 1990s the proportion of the public with college degrees or at least those who had attended college had reached such a level that the mystique of a university was beginning to disappear. Criticism became more public.
- As students assumed a greater share of their education costs they also began to view themselves as consumers and became more assertive.

- The demographics of students changed dramatically in the early 1990s with the undergraduate no longer being the dominant group nor even the fastest growing group.

- As we moved into the 90s public research universities began to refer to themselves as state-assisted universities with many deriving as much as 75% of their budgets from non state funds.

- In the midst of this shift in funding, privatization emerged as a common practice within public institutions.

- Sole source contracts have moved from basketball shoes to soft drinks to events and now to instructional technology.

- In the context of a growing demand for higher education and a public demand for reduced costs, the rallying call among presidents has become downsizing and restructuring. Neither are driven by conceptual thought, but rather by the commitment to balance the budget. We have learned that to balance the budget you can increase sales or you can reduce costs. In higher education costs are associated with people.

- In the face of downsizing, governing boards are calling for post tenure review as a practice while ad hoc and non -tenure track appointments are on the rise.

- As technology appeared on the scene most universities became lost in the morass of installing the infrastructure for voice, data and video while largely ignoring the instructional implications of technology.

- The fastest growing institutions of higher education in this country today are virtual universities. On most campuses faculty are still trying to figure out if online instruction is pedagogically sound while consumers are unequivocally telling them by their enrollments that it is.

- The next major change may be the commercial sector becoming involved in the marketing of content. They now own the delivery system--why not the content? They can hire content experts as easily and maybe more easily than universities.

I know that I am beginning to sound like a broken CD, but the point is that our institutions are in constant change. The environment for which we must prepare leadership personnel is changing. We cannot close our eyes to this changing world.

You may view this 40-year chronology of change in higher education as interesting, inevitable, and maybe even exciting. But, I can assure you it will significantly alter the culture in which our departments of special education were reared and we were nurtured. We have taken that culture for granted and I believe it is about to be sacrificed in the name of "change."

Keep in mind the essence of this history and reflect on your own institutions as I comment briefly on the culture that has served us so well and that may be disappearing.

Culture

In response to the premise that higher education should be run like a business, most of us have argued that education is not a business. When pushed we concede that universities generate revenue, incur expenses, market products, hire employees, and have customers. But, we fall short of admitting to being a business.

What causes most of us to resist that admission is the unique culture of higher education. Aside from the obvious elements of academic freedom and tenure, we value and view as unique our relationships with students, our role in research and teaching, the collegiality that is the heart of our environment, and the openness that encourages debate and freedom of expression. Generating and preserving knowledge is central to the mission of academic institutions. No business has this culture…not even Microsoft.

The governance structure in higher education has historically been bottom up, with faculty having a central role in decisions governing curriculum and faculty welfare. Even the administrative structure has incorporated an important role in support of faculty with department chairs being advocates for the faculty and deans advocates for programs.

We can take no credit for the creation of this culture. It was created by early academics and has characterized higher education for over a century in this country. The academic culture combined with the consistent pattern of

external support created the conditions that resulted in special education becoming what it is today on our campuses.

These conditions alone did not spawn the research and academic programs, but the conditions attracted talented people who understood the culture-they saw the potential-they capitalized on it and here we are—four decades later.

Our vulnerability:

Even if we are successful, with the help of agencies such as OSEP, in maintaining external support in the future, it is my belief that special education programs within our universities have never been more vulnerable.

If we fail to persist as R&D academic units with an interdisciplinary focus on disability we will become very ordinary as academic units. When that occurs, the level of inquiry we have established, the instrumentality that we have achieved on behalf of disability as an area worthy of study, and our value on our campuses will diminish.

I say this not as an alarmist. If I have become anything over the last quarter of a century as an administrator it has been a student of higher education. As an administrator I taught every semester and enjoyed both worlds. I have now returned to my academic home, and I am now trying to make sense out of this schizophrenic life. I have tried to put the puzzle together by doing what special education professors do--seeking funding for my research, trying to be innovative in my teaching, developing partnerships with students, and when time permits being a good academic citizen.

It has been exciting, but not easy. The difficulty lies in the constant change universities are experiencing, the change in our institutional culture and sensing the failure of faculty to recognize what is occurring.

Let me share some examples of why I believe we are vulnerable.

- Most special education programs grew quickly in the early 70s and are now facing the retirement of senior people.

- Restructuring is occurring in schools of education where the leadership may not be supportive of special education as R&D departments.

- A growing number of graduate students are practicing professionals, unable or unwilling to pursue full time studies which would allow them to become immersed in the academic culture and our efforts in inquiry.

- Administrators including chairs, but especially deans, find themselves more and more involved in the agenda of their presidents than providing leadership for the programs they represent.

- The role of faculty is changing with expectations in teaching and service increasing while research seems to remain important but also to be valued less by those who control institutional resources.

- The composition of governing boards in many states is changing and at the same time they are becoming more micro in their management orientation.

- The rapid and widespread turnover among central administrators in higher education is resulting in the loss of institutional memory. That is very detrimental to programs with an R&D history that are represented on the contemporary scene by those with limited or no R&D experience.

- Faculty governance is being weakened by the lack of faculty participation and the tendency of administrators, under the guise of short timelines from governing boards, to make decisions without sufficient faculty input.

- External forces from a variety of sources are calling for specific changes. Some are so strong they cannot be ignored. Consequently, some changes are being made for the sake of change.

- Institutional loyalty, while stronger than what occurs in the business world, is no longer as strong as it once was among faculty.

- We have always had faculty members who marched to their own drum. They were and are successful. That has been especially true in special education. However, in academe, it is the program not the reputation of an individual that is ultimately valued. That lesson has not been learned.

What can we do?

I mentioned earlier that special education departments are typically the type of department valued in a comprehensive university. Regardless of how far the institution has moved in restructuring, outsourcing, downsizing or in hiring ad hoc instructors versus tenure track faculty, the bottom line is that they value those departments and units that produce scholarship, prepare leadership personnel, generate external support for research and attract quality students.

Your challenge over the next couple of decades is to do what is necessary to retain those attributes as a department while also being viewed as a good citizen of the institution. And you must do this even while your institution continues to change and the gap between the academic culture of the past and the present continues to widen.

This will not be easy. Internal forces will be pulling you in other directions as your institution changes.

What a department does to ensure its future will obviously depend on what is currently occurring at their institution. Let me share some thoughts from my perspective on ensuring the future. Consider them food for thought and not a prescription.

1. **Keep your R&D focus**. Do not allow restructuring to separate the two in function or identity. Once you do, the academic program soon becomes like any other program or at a minimum, it will be perceived like any other.

2. **Resist restructuring that diminishes your special education identity.** Don't assume that the logic of inclusion in K-12 translates to higher education. If universities reorganized every time a profession restructured its practice we would have chaos. You do not see other profession's reorganizing their higher education programs to look like their practicing profession; the missions and cultures are different. Similarity in structure is not required and it may even be detrimental. Let's not waste energy on something that is not productive when there is so much to do.

3. **At all costs remain interdisciplinary.** Don't lessen your commitment to professional education, but don't give up your interdisciplinary commitment just to become a better education department. I say that as an ex dean who remains committed to schools of education. Once you become only a teacher education department the probabilities are that you will not distinguish yourselves in a way that allows you to do what you have done in the past on your campus.

4. **Be smart in developing your curriculum.** Look at your teaching resources and bring your curriculum in line with what you can support-even if that means eliminating courses. Don't create conditions that make research difficult or over tax your teaching faculty. Departments must have degrees of flexibility to be responsive to opportunities. You have to create those degrees of flexibility by balancing your resources and commitments.

5. **Assess where the institution is going in the long term and don't respond to knee jerk reactions:** Try to engage the right representatives of central administration in a dialogue – even if you have to broaden the audience in order for them to justify taking the time. You don't have to be responsive to all institutional agenda…choose one for which you have strengths that will allow you to excel. Be certain it serves departmental needs while also serving the institutional agenda.

6. **Make no assumptions about who will represent the interests of your department when institutional policy decisions are being made.** Develop your own advocates. Educate them about what you do and the uniqueness of your department in the context of its potential.

7. **If you do not have a private fund-raising program in your department, begin one.** Don't assume that education alumni have few resources or are poor prospects, or that only alumni are interested in investing in what you do. Begin to systematically cultivate your alumni. Fund raising in universities is expected. Deans are expected to be effective fundraisers. But, remember, graduates identify with their departments and not the people who rotate through the dean's office. Remember everyone has an interest in quality education and large numbers are concerned with the education of children and youth with disabilities. It takes work, but it will pay off. It is also a behavior that the institution values. The discretionary use that may be made of a private dollar triples its value.

8. **Make an investment in online instruction.** Most of our universities are conservative in this area but they know that they must do something. Do it for them. In the name of your institution raise the bar and do it right, but do it. Become the example of online instruction your institution needs.

9. **Possibly the most difficult and least talked about initiative that you can take is for each faculty member to demonstrate a little leadership in focusing their professional efforts in support of their department.** The reward system for faculty tends to reinforce individuals for doing their own thing. They get rewarded for publishing, for obtaining grants, for the number of students they advise and teach, for awards they receive and for their national reputations. Collectively, all of these behaviors benefit the department. I concede that. But when the crunch comes it is the department that is assessed and it is the department that must be accountable.

It is important to pull together and make decisions in the best interest of the department. We are entering an era when the departmental unit needs attention. If we as individuals are to have the quality of life we expect and value as professors, and if we are to be effective in our role, we must be in strong departments. Institutions today are no longer as tolerant of lone rangers as they used to be.

10. **Never undervalue the importance of collegiality within your own department.** It is difficult to maintain, but it is worth the price. This may be the most critical factor in maintaining your position of strength in your institution. Never assume that it is as good as you believe it to be-always work on it. When there is a break down in collegiality the public perception is that you have a department in trouble. That is not necessarily the case, but it can be hard to overcome that perception and it soon begins to affect student recruitment and faculty productivity.

Summary

There is always a risk in making this kind of presentation. Not everyone sees the world in the same way. If you say it like you see it, some may think the future is dismal and now is the time to look for greener pastures. Despite the message I have shared I am not sure there are greener pastures. The

health care industry is in disarray. Law is suffering. Agriculture is struggling. Business is anything but stable. Even the military is changing.

Central to the change occurring in all fields seems to be the quality of life issues that center around the life and role of the professional. The quality of life for a professor remains very good even though the academic culture is changing. However, the key factor in determining the quality of life enjoyed by a professor-- I would argue-- is the quality of the department in which your appointment resides. If you are interested in a good quality of life, pay your dues to your department and ensure its future.

.Going to the office next Monday and taking for granted what you have will not get the job done. Don't expect the chair to get the job done alone -- its your job too.

To prepare leadership personnel for the future requires that you demonstrate leadership today and that we, in collaboration with our colleagues at the federal level, determine the partnership for the future so that those with disabilities continue to benefit from what this unique partnership has produced. This dialogue should begin soon and engage the best-thinking in the field. Without the right partnership much will be lost. Both the preparation of leadership personnel and the quality of research will become vulnerable.

In my judgement this partnership holds the key to the quality of life persons with disabilities will enjoy in the future. The partnership has proven its value.

What I was not prepared for when I returned to the faculty full-time two years ago was the realization that, embedded in the many changes that are impinging on higher education is something that is making a special education professor today and in the near future exciting and that is technology.

Think for a moment what technology offers. First of all, it brings to us a new pedagogy in the form of online instruction. It creates for us a communication vehicle that is instant and global. No colleague is very far away. It brings new meaning to collaboration. Opportunities for research are extant in every aspect of our role as professors.

Technology does not discriminate against persons with disabilities. It enhances equity.

Look at technology as an opportunity to be part of a new beginning. The fact that this revolution in how we teach and how we learn is happening during our careers as teachers and researchers is a rare occurrence.

Use this excitement as your source of motivation and energy as you face the challenge of positioning your department to survive — in style -- in the changing culture of higher education.

Thank you.